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**WHAT HAPPENED AT KHAJJI:
LEARNING THE WRONG LESSON**

BY

**LIEUTENANT COLONEL DANIEL P. BOLGER
United States Army**

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by

LTC Daniel P. Bolger

Professor David Jablonsky
Project Advisor

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U.S. Army War College
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013

ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Daniel P. Bolger, LTC, Infantry, U.S. Army

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Many defense experts believe that the era of the ground-gaining foot soldier has ended. They charge that precision weaponry has made riflemen superfluous to modern battle, except perhaps in a special operations mode, providing terminal guidance and battle damage assessments. A favorite case in point involves the fighting around Ras Al Khafji, Saudi Arabia during the 1990-91 Gulf War.

The circumstances around Khafji were unique, and we draw a larger lesson at our peril. That enemy, that terrain, and that preponderance of U.S. strength are not guaranteed in future battles. We should view Khafji as the exception, not the rule. Victory through airpower alone remains atypical in modern war.

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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KUWAIT

SAUDI ARABIA

OP-7

OP-8

Persian
Gulf

desalination plant

Cpl. Lentz & team

Cpl. Ingraham & team

gas station
(3d Marines
forward OP)

Ras Al Khafji
29 January 1991

0

1

2 miles

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WHAT HAPPENED AT KHAJJI: LEARNING THE WRONG LESSONS

They have yet to make a jet fighter-bomber with a bayonet stud.

Walter B. Clark
Colonel, Infantry
United States Army

The Iraqis started the battle by surrendering. Just before last light on 29 January 1991, U.S. Marines manning Outpost 8 (OP-8) watched three bedraggled privates trudge slowly down the coast road, hands up. One waved the obligatory white flag. The trio stopped to check in, well aware of the protocol for quitting. The Iraqis definitely knew that drill. When an Arabic speaker in OP-8 queried the three, the men announced that they had come south because their officers had all fled north, spooked by the Coalition's massive bombing effort.¹ The Marines briefly held the Iraqis at the two-story cement customs post commanded from the Saudis for border surveillance, then packed them into a desert-tan Humveee for transport to the rear. There, the three reluctant warriors joined their several fellows in a Saudi Arabian prisoner compound.

With any other opponent, that kind of episode might have seemed very strange, but not with these people. A steady trickle of line-crossers conditioned the border outposts to this kind of behavior. Iraqis began giving up almost as soon as the Americans reached the border back in the late summer of 1990. Now, with the bombing in its twelfth day and no letup in sight, the number of quitters skyrocketed. This latest encounter amounted to more of the same.

The enemy soldiers stepped out from the nearest known Iraqi troop concentrations, a screen of small teams occupying camouflaged bunkers strung along the international boundary. Previous defectors originated further north, among the main belts of dug-in Iraqi infantry formations. A few even came from the mobile armored brigades backing up those defenses. An inventory of the Coalition POW cages nicely reflected the array opposite the Americans and their Arab associates, with the closer outfits more heavily represented. The Iraqi defensive laydown was leaking men from the bottom, more every day the rain of bombs continued.

This most recent Iraqi threesome entered Coalition lines, such as they were, through what would have been

called 'no man's land" back in World War I. Out west, such deserters usually met a vigilant United States Marines patrolling along the international boundary aboard their speedy light armored vehicles (LAVs). But the LAVs did not run in this lonely stretch. Here along the Persian Gulf, the main Coalition defensive positions lay almost thirty miles to the south of the Kuwaiti border. In this area, you had to cross empty desert—no-man's land.

Of course, as in World War I, the evocative term did not quite match reality. As the Iraqis knew well, there were Americans out there at places like OP-8; not many, but the sort that promised results out of proportion to their numbers. From north to south these included Army Special Forces (SF) and Navy SEALs across the border in occupied Kuwait, Marines of the 1st Surveillance, Reconnaissance, and Intelligence Group (1st SRIG) holding OPs 7 and 8 right on the international boundary, various SEAL/SF forward operations cells in and around the abandoned coastal town of Ras Al Khafji, a smattering of Saudi/Qatari elements to provide early warning and show Arab flags, and then a yawning gap of open desert, backstopped by the only significant ground contingent, 3d Marine Regiment's Task

Force Taro.² In American military terminology, this region allowed for economy of force, a secondary effort to free up troops for more vital commitments elsewhere.

It all made good tactical sense. The Coalition had plenty of work to do well to the west. No American commanders wanted—or expected—a major fracas here on the coast. So a buffer zone in this locale served to absorb whatever the Iraqis might have in mind, so far mostly surrendering, plus a few odd artillery harassing rounds. This diddling about hurt nothing. After all, Saudi Arabia had plenty of desert to spare.

This unimportant stretch, unlikely to be struck, made a good parking lot for the suspect brigades of America's Arab allies. On the big charts at U.S. Central Command, the area around empty Khafji belonged to Joint Forces Command—East, a very impressive name for a rather unimpressive collection of unblooded Saudi Arabian and Gulf Arab units. Nobody seriously expected these people to fight.³ Thus, in reality, the Khafji neighborhood belonged to less than a hundred elite Americans. Their main job was to contain any Iraqi effort without disturbing or drawing in other American ground units. And though all hoped that the Arabs would do

their part, any serious shooting to be done here depended upon Americans staying at their posts and bringing down the thunder of Allied airpower from the night skies.

The Americans began yet another typical evening by delivering a dose of that fire from above. About 2000, Marine air/naval gunfire spotters attached to 1st SRIG detected some Iraqi artillery moving into a shooting configuration just across the border. Captain Douglas Kleinsmith and his men called in an airstrike. Marine A-6E Intruder jets responded, racing into enemy airspace to knock out the Iraqi howitzers. The horizon lit up with bomb bursts. Secondary explosions rumbled across the dark desert for ten minutes thereafter. The pilots claimed to have knocked out at least two 152mm pieces.⁴ Nobody at OP-8 thought much of the engagement. That sort of thing happened a lot up here. Kleinsmith and his crew had done it before and fully expected to do it again.

About an hour went by with nothing else from the Iraqis. Then, peering through night vision scopes, the Americans saw something new. It got everyone's attention, all right.

Emerging out of the darkness, a long file of enemy tanks rumbled south on the coast road. Nobody had seen this kind of display in previous scraps. What did it mean?

The Americans scanned carefully, trying to divine the enemy's intentions. The Iraqi armor showed as shadowy blobs in the greenish viewers of the starlight scopes, and as white-hot—or black-hot, depending on the setting selected—geometric forms in the thermal devices. Based on previous training and experience, the Marines agreed that the lead hostiles looked like T-55s, elderly Russian-made tanks sporting 100mm main guns, plus the requisite suite of machineguns.

In a minute, they convinced each other of what they saw: more folks ready to throw in the towel, and in a big way. The long line of Iraqi T-55 tanks motoring along the coastal highway all had their turrets facing backwards, a time-honored signal of surrender. Flat-topped, low Chinese-model Type 63 armored infantry carriers appeared, following behind the first several tanks. It sure looked like a mass capitulation.⁵ Maybe those three prisoners from earlier had the picture. Perhaps the Iraqi leadership really skipped

town, and now the lower ranks were voting with their feet—or treads, to be precise.

The Marines held their fire. No one wanted to cause an unfortunate incident. Some Americans began to call in reports, alerting the 3d Marines to expect a lot of prisoners. The enemy armor continued to roll, closing steadily on the silent American-held outpost.

A flare went up from the lead tank, then another: red, then green. Uh-oh, that did not look quite right. Kleinsmith and his men exchanged glances. Something definitely felt wrong about this.

Yellow stars blossomed suddenly over the coast road, as unseen Iraqi artillery batteries popped open parachute flares to light the way for their comrades. Illuminated by the pale saffron glow aloft, the enemy T-55s spun their turrets. Big 100mm cannons barked, and machineguns began to stutter. This was no surrender, not at all. These guys were attacking.

Looking west, Kleinsmith and his men saw more flares floating above OP-7. The radios crackled with contact reports. Well to the west, the Marines in their LAVs also

described major firefights with Iraqi armor. Calls for air support and artillery fire came from all stations.

In front of OP-8, dozens of Iraqi armored vehicles closed on the little border station. The enemy fired indiscriminately, rounds pinging off the outpost's cement walls. Four men of SEAL Team One, who shared the OP with Kleinsmith's Marine observers, moved outside to the roadbed to get a closer look at the foe. They got that in spades.

Hospitalman 3d Class Joe Baxter and his team mates huddled in the roadside ditch. Baxter held a loaded 40mm grenade launcher, and his partners carried throwaway AT-4 antitank rockets. All four took aim at likely targets.

They could have done some damage, and they knew it. Baxter later wrote that "tracers as big as beer bottles were zipping right over out heads, but we knew they [the Iraqis] couldn't see our camouflaged bodies. If we fired back, it was sure to bring a hail of devastating fire directly into us."⁶ With the Marines in the tower to consider, and certain knowledge that their show of resistance would likely be futile, the Navy special operators stayed concealed and let these angels of death pass by.

Save for the unfocused Iraqi shooting, the column ignored the SEALS and the little OP. When it looked like the enemy column had passed, Kleinsmith and his men, including Baxter's quartet, piled into their Humvees. Wisely ignoring the coastal highway, the Marines bounced out into the desert, heading south for Khafji. Kleinsmith and his partners wanted to get to a designated linkup point at the town's water tower. Little did they realize that the Iraqi armored force had the exact same destination.

Five miles to the west, the neighbors out at OP-7 also prepared to pull back, but not before calling in night-capable Marine AH-1W SeaCobra attack choppers. The U.S. spotters counted some 25 enemy vehicles in their vicinity, all streaming south toward Khafji. They hunkered down in their little concrete border fort and guided in the Marine helos.

Four SeaCobras flew out to support OP-7, led by Maj. Michael Steele. They roared in less than fifty feet off the black desert floor, passing over OP-7, looking for targets. Their voices calm and businesslike—amazingly so, given their isolation and peril—Marine observers pointed the arriving helicopters in the right direction.

About a mile north of Al Khafji, Steele and his wingmen found their quarry. Six squat Type-63s waited, engines running, crewmen milling around, utterly unsuspecting. The little cupola hatches with their long black 12.7mm heavy machineguns all stood unmanned. The Marine fliers tilted forward and opened up.

Steele's 5-inch Zuni rocket gutted one of the troop carriers, tearing it open in a bright flash. The others scattered, three fleeing south, two circling their stricken comrade. The Iraqis fired back, not with particular skill, but with enthusiasm. More U.S. rockets and 20mm chin guns answered. Steele thought his men nailed another Type-63 before the SeaCobras broke off.⁷ It seemed a small stroke, but it underscored an important characteristic of the battle. Each little U.S. team felt obliged to call in some firepower. A self-propelled gun lost here, an armored troop transport lost there, and over the hours, the toll mounted. The Iraqis began to suffer the first of a thousand cuts, courtesy of rampaging American airmen above and a handful of stoic men on the ground.

That certainly happened when the enemy armor banged into the next major clot of Americans. A mile or so down

the coast, OP-8's first warnings alerted the mixed bag of twenty-odd SEALs, Green Berets, and Marines working at the desalinization plant. While some of the special operators frantically scooped up cryptological gear, secret documents, and maps showing cross-border missions involving the Kuwaiti resistance, others moved outside to confront the enemy armored thrust. It arrived within minutes, as advertised.

As they had done at the border OPs, the T-55s pushed on, oblivious to the dark figures moving around the periphery of the desalinization plant. Finally, one of the trailing mounted infantry elements took some interest in one group of Americans.

As a few flat-topped Type-63 personnel carriers raced by, one Iraqi in his little cupola sighted Marines and SEALs at the roadside. Without even asking his driver to slow down, the enemy gunner casually sprayed machine gun bullets at the Americans lying prone about fifty yards away. The wild burst dug up sand and dirt to no effect. One Marine fired back with an M-203 40mm grenade launcher, but he missed, too. The Iraqi armor pressed on, ignoring the U.S. teams.

The SEALs made the Iraqis pay for their cavalier attitude. Using superb SOF radios and handheld compact laser designators (CLDs) to mark targets, these Navy special warfare men called in some night-rigged A-10A Warthogs. As the Marines, Army SF teams, and other SEALs packed quickly to move south, the SEALs guided in a relay of Air Force jets. This violent sequence nicely covered the American extraction back to Khafji, to that same water tower assembly point sought by Doug Kleinsmith. A SEAL summarized bluntly: "The A-10s just ate them up."⁸

The various Americans filtered into their predesignated assembly point near the Khafji water tower. The senior man, Lt. Col. Richard M. Barry of the 1st SRIG, knew that he might not have much time to get organized. He sent Capt. Jon Fleming and another Marine officer to the top of the eight-story structure to try to find the approaching Iraqis. Fleming and his buddy reached the upper deck and looked north.

It looked very bad indeed. More than ten Iraqi T-55 tanks, with at least as many Type-63s right on their tails, had reached the northern edge of town. The enemy vehicles randomly shot up each building as they approached. Green

tracers skipped off rooftops and careened off of walls and paved streets. In between these bright sparks hung four or more unseen slugs. Fleming knew that staying on the exposed tower, not to mention Khafji, probably meant death. He reported as much to Barry.

Rick Barry, faced a very hard decision. He had not accounted for all of his men, let alone the SEALs and the Green Berets. The Arab allies, of course, had long since headed south at maximum speed. If Barry had time to squirrel into the woodwork, he might well have stayed in Khafji to direct airstrikes and artillery fires. But caught like this, on the run, with a bunch of enemy tanks nipping at their heels, pretty much ruled out remaining in town. If he left now, he could call in one more air attack and save about thirty Americans for sure. The rest, the ones not here, knew how to get back on their own. They had rehearsed the withdrawal scheme in the past. Well, if any of them expected to make it till morning, the Marine officer could not wait. Barry chose the lesser of two evils and pulled the plug.

Called back suddenly, Fleming and his associate pounded back down the metal stairs. The first few Marine light

trucks had already started south, with the Iraqi tanks crossing the causeway just north of the water tower. With no time to spare, Fleming and his fellow Marine leapt into a waiting Humvee.⁹ They sped off. A parting airstrike call marked their departure.

Behind them, under the bombs on inbound U.S. aircraft, Barry and Fleming and their men left the advanced guard of Iraq's 5th Mechanized Infantry Division. The enemy held Khafji.

But holding a place and keeping a place are two different things. Yes, the Iraqis had about a brigade's worth of tanks and infantry carriers in a Saudi Arabian town. But unknown to Saddam Hussein's happy warriors, they had company.

Some of that company did its duty far from Ras Al Khafji. U.S. staybehinds worked in the black world of clandestine cross-border operations, SEALs and Green Berets aiding Kuwait's resistance and doing double-duty calling in airstrikes, along with teams sent in expressly to mark targets for American warplanes. These small elements ensured that the Iraqi forces trying to reinforce Khafji

never got there. Their superb spotting gutted out most of the Iraqi 5th Mechanized Division's follow-on echelon, along with the enemy's 1st Mechanized and 3d Armored divisions.

Intensified bombing and strafing in southeastern Iraq ravaged all three enemy formations. Some accounts also credited overhead radar imaging from specially-outfitted aircraft, roaming drones with recon cameras, and other such useful gadgets.¹⁰ But men on the ground, skilled SOF types, did all the heavy lifting. Their consistent reporting and targeting calls allowed the Coalition air armada to cut off the Iraqis that made it to Khafji.

In the town itself, two Marine recon teams remained in hiding. Inserted by Col. John H. Admire, commander of the 3d Marine Regiment, the pair of six-man elements both went to Al Khafji before the Iraqi attack. They had been sent in to provide early warning for the main body of Marines defending to the south, a normal precaution in a security zone. More such scouts would be found as you got closer to the major Marine battle positions. But out here in SOF and Arab land, two teams seemed like a reasonable investment.

The two recon outfits split up the little built-up area, coordinating their coverage before the Iraqis

attacked. Corporal Lawrence Lentz's group had been in the empty village about six days, holed up in an unfinished two-floor building in the northeast corner of Khafji. Corporal Charles Ingraham and his five men came in on 28 January. They chose a four story edifice in the southern half of the town, overlooking the main street. Both young team leaders could have gotten out with Barry's Marines, the SEALS, and the rest. "I'm leaving it up to you," the 3d Marines' recon commander stated radioed the Iraqi tanks clanked into town. Lentz did not hesitate. "We'll stay," he said.¹¹

That gutsy decision doomed the Iraqi conquerors of Khafji. A more competent infantry outfit would have searched the buildings on 30 January to clear out U.S. holdouts like Lentz and Ingraham. But the Iraqis did not bother. They paid for their incompetence.

The two teams both remained undetected for about a day and a half. They alternated calling for jets, armed helos, and artillery, peppering the Iraqi tanks and armored vehicles parked haphazardly in and among the ghost town's buildings. To the enemy, it must have appeared like the Americans had some brand of truly incredible precision strike systems, as missiles and bombs and shells screamed in

from distant sites and always looked to be on the mark. Iraqi leaders credited satellites, infrared snoopers, and similar high-technology, not considering that their tormentors' best targeting means hid right in their midst.

Charles Ingraham had the only close call, about noon on 30 January. A squad of Iraqi riflemen entered the lobby down on the ground floor. They could see the green domed metal helmet tops clustered near the doorway, and hear the lilting Arabic phrases. Its engine growling, a Type-63 personnel carrier waited in the street. The bad guys were looking for food, loot, or both, wandering here and there around the first floor rooms. Their clomping boots echoed in the empty rooms.

Ingraham and his men coolly turned to their best weapons, their radios. "I called in artillery and close air support," Ingraham wrote later. "On one of the artillery missions, my assistant team leader got hit by shrapnel." The Marines brought the rounds in close, "danger close," gunner parlance for right on top of the Americans. It worked. The Iraqis scuttled out, some howling, others tearing off across the street. Some fell to the bursting shells and bombs. A few made it into the nearby troop

transport, which gunned its motor and drove off.¹² Ingraham and company could breathe again.

Larry Lentz also kept Marine artillerymen and U.S. aviators busy. One mission wrecked one of Iraq's prized Brazilian-model Astros II multiple rocket launcher. Another hammered an enemy ten-man foot patrol, tossing these unfortunates off the long causeway that connected the north part of town to the south.¹³ Like Ingraham, Lentz put an orange VS-17 identification panel on his rooftop observation post. To American pilots, it was easy to pick out the two friendly buildings. Everything else became fair game.

While Ingraham and Lentz killed Iraqis, the Coalition prepared a counterattack. Marine Col. John Admire very much wanted to do it with his own superb 3d Marines, led by the LAVs, American tanks, and Marine riflemen of TF Taro. But this area belonged to Joint Forces Command—East, the Saudis and their Gulf Arab friends. If the Americans went ahead and retook Ras Al Khafji, that promised long-term repercussions in the fragile American/Arab alliance, the key to the whole polyglot anti-Iraq Coalition. It was high time to let the Saudi military earn its pay. Trusting in his two young corporals to do their part, Admire chose to let the

Saudis carry the ball, "one of the most difficult decisions" he ever made.¹⁴ To their credit, the Saudi commanders pledged to attack as soon as possible to rescue the two plucky Marine recon teams, not to mention ejecting the noxious Iraqis from the kingdom's holy soil.

After their fashion, the Saudi Arabian National Guard's King Abdul Azziz Brigade went into battle. They rumbled forward about 1700 on 30 January, their thirty or so V-150 armored, wheeled scout cars led by twenty-two Qatari tanks. They got as far as the gas station two miles south of town, where they met the advanced parties of the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines. They halted there for several hours to coordinate supporting fires, all to be provided by the Americans, through the good offices of attached American Marine observer teams and U.S. Army advisors of both conventional and SF flavors.

Some time around 2300, with supporting fires still pretty well balled up as the Americans attempted to discern the somewhat confused Saudi plan, the attack started anyway. Saudi V-150 wheeled armored cars blithely outran the Qatari AMX-30 French-built tanks. They almost left behind several American liaison teams, among them the vital air and

artillery spotters. The 3d Marines' watch center warned Lentz and Ingraham to take cover, good advice under the circumstances.

Without much evident organization, the whole blob of attacking vehicles rammed into Khafji. Larry Lentz and his men watched the Saudis blazing away, a vigorous fusillade matched and exceeded by the Iraqis. The lattice of red and green tracers reminded some Americans of a very poorly run two-way night firing range, lots of noise generated and ammunition expended, but few hits. Like most soldiers new to battle, both sides shot high and outside, inflicting casualties more due to volume than accuracy. By 0320, the Saudis pulled back to the edge of town, ready to pick up the fight after daybreak.¹⁵ The Iraqis kept Khafji.

Although kept at altitude by the wild criss-crossing web of tracers, American airpower kept up the pressure, steered by Lentz and Ingraham and their indefatigable partners. Artillery missions also continued, but the American airpower truly made its presence felt. The fliers had a field day, pounding the Iraqis in Khafji and all of their follow-on echelons strung back across the border. "It's almost like you flipped on the light in the kitchen

late at night and the cockroaches started scurrying, and we're killing them" commented one Marine aviator.¹⁶ Indeed they were.

The Iraqis finally achieved some measure of revenge early on 31 January, when a big, unmaneuverable AC-130H Spectre gunship stayed aloft too long after sunrise. During the night, two other Spectres tore up an eight-vehicle Iraqi column caught on the highway north of Khafji. Now, arriving just before dawn, this third ship started doing especially good work. The 105mm cannon, 40mm light cannon, and 20mm Gatling guns ripped up Iraqi vehicles stalled along the coastal road. Ground observers, likely SEALs near OP-8, tried to vector the Spectre toward a suspected enemy rocket launcher. The sun came up while the gunship hunted the elusive target. They should have turned off, too vulnerable in daylight, but this Spectre crew wanted that rocket launcher, and so kept flying. For a while, they got away with it.

Normally, you could get rich banking on Iraqi passivity and ineptitude. But this time, the bad guys proved able enough. An enemy shoulder-fired missile smacked into the AC-130H's left wing at 0623. The hit ignited fuel, and the

plane shuddered. With a slow, ugly shrug, the big converted transport rolled over and plunged into the Persian Gulf. All fourteen aboard died.¹⁷ It hurt, all right, but it also did not stop the pressure from American air.

The Saudis resumed their attack about two hours after the Spectre went down. In daytime, the Saudi National Guardsmen and their Qatari allies managed to come to close quarters with the Iraqis. Tank fire and machinegun rounds chewed up buildings, though the inexperienced Saudi infantry proved understandably reluctant to dismount. They suffered for that hesitation. Sixteen died when two thin-skinned V-150s exploded, one peeled open by a T-55's 100mm cannon, the other ripped apart by a volley of rocket propelled grenades, those same everpresent RPGs fated to wreck the hopes of the U.S. TF Ranger on a future long afternoon in Mogadishu. The roiling, inexpert urban scrum resembled a finish fight between the Keystone Kops and the Marx Brothers, but nobody was playing it for laughs, least of all the poor soldiers getting killed as they learned and relearned the basics of street fighting.

Having seen enough of Saudi combat skill the night before, Ingraham elected not to wait for rescue by the

allies. Instead, the corporal took advantage of the tumultuous tank battle. Around mid-morning, he and his five men grabbed an orange VS-17 panel, the better to ward off overeager Saudi V-150 gunners. Weapons in hand, the Marines headed south on foot, weaving through the smoky, bullet-pocked streets. His account downplays the team's skillful movement through the chaos:

We escaped, linked up, extracted when the Saudis and their V-150s were just on the outskirts of the city. Either an Iraqi tank or APC [armored personnel carrier] was burning on the side of the building when we hit the street. The smoke and secondary explosions from it helped to cover our egress. We were very, very, very lucky throughout the whole ordeal.¹⁸

Charles Ingraham brought in all his men, and caught a ride back with the Saudis. A few hours later, Larry Lentz also left. Lentz and his men had to shoot an Iraqi sniper on their way out, but M-16A2 rifle fire and two M-72A2 Light Antitank Weapon (LAW) 66mm rockets resolved that annoyance. Lentz actually drove out in his team's overloaded Humvee, battered, holed, and with tires shredded flat. About 1300, they finally met fellow Americans at the gas station south of town held by the 3d Marines.¹⁹ Lentz, too, got all his men out without injury.

The Saudis and Qataris fought all day and into the next day, too, but finally took Khafji. Their effort earned some genuine respect from the Americans. At some cost, the Saudis had kept their word, and learned something about modern war.²⁰ But all involved knew who really won the clash at the border town.

American firepower, especially its air component, reigned supreme. Almost every American team in the Khafji fight brought in strikes, including those that displaced to the south. The stay-behinds really outdid themselves. Guided by skilled SOF and Marine observers, men like Larry Lentz and Charles Ingraham kept up the hammering day and night. The Iraqis cracked under the beating, and in a politically useful gesture, game Saudis and Qataris gained credit for the *denouement*.

Postwar analysis reflected more than a thousand air sorties engaged in and around Al Khafji from 29 January through 1 February 1991. Marine Corps AV-8B Harrier II jump jets flew more missions than at any time except during the later ground campaign, and Air Force A-10A Warthogs flew an incredible 293 sorties on 30 January alone, a performance not even exceeded in the ground phase of *Desert Storm*.

Intelligence bean-counters later assessed total damage to be 377 tanks, 233 armored personnel carriers, and 397 artillery pieces. This essentially finished off the three Iraqi divisions staged for the Khafji incursion.²¹ Although pilot claims must be taken with a grain of salt, even in this age of spy satellites and bombsight videotapes, American warbirds certainly inflicted terrific carnage in the border battle.

To paraphrase the end of *King Kong*, it looked like the airplanes got them. That in fact amounted to the verdict on the entire Gulf War. Most military pundits and defense experts sniffed a revolution in military affairs.²² It looked, smelled, and sounded like that American holy grail, war without infantry, and hence, without casualties. All of that would have been news to Larry Lentz and Charles Ingraham, among others. But lacking doctorates in security studies, they were not consulted.

They should have been consulted, along with all the other Army 11B10s and Marine 0311s who knew better. Instead, many senior defense leaders, both in and out of uniform, seized on Khafji as the shape of things to come.

Faced with an avowed requirement to stop a conventional invasion of an allied state in the Persian Gulf or Korea, the events of 29 January to 1 February 1991 seem mighty appealing. A few Americans with good radios and stout hearts, lots of nifty satellites and loitering radar planes, a huge swack of jets, a mountain of ordnance, some of it brilliantly precise, and. . . *wham!* Scratch three hostile heavy divisions. We even let the junior coalition partners police up the mess, good for the morale of all.

This is not some casual musing, either. America has begun to reshape its forces to recreate Khafji on a theater scale, should Iraq, Iran, or North Korea come calling.²³ Given that only the 82d Airborne and 101st Airborne ready brigades, the Rangers, a Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), and assorted SOF can reach any war zone in days, how do you stop a big enemy armored offensive quickly? The answer seems obvious. Consider this recent statement by Gulf War air commander Gen. Charles A. Horner: "Because it demonstrated what airpower can do to an attacking armored force in a halt phase scenario, I believe Khafji, though largely overlooked, was the single most important land battle of Desert Storm."²⁴

Once you do the big Khafji, the bad guys grind to a halt. Then, as Air Force Maj. Gen. Charles D. Link suggests, "the ground war becomes an option rather than an inevitability."²⁵ It's sort of like the world's most awesome artillery preparation, so good and so precise that it just breaks the bad guys' will and leaves them blubbering in their shattered, fuel-starved vehicles. Well, maybe. . .

That all works, provided the enemy agrees to serve as a tethered goat and not fight back all that much, and that the terrain and weather make it easy to find the bad guys. The Iraqis surely proved inordinately cooperative. Not all foes or climes so neatly match that intriguing version of today's American way of war.

We have heard this siren song before, during the original revolution in military affairs, the Soviet Army's name for the changes in warfare caused by the introduction of nuclear weaponry. The nukes meant no more infantry, no more mess and fuss, death from above. So we heard back in 1945, after Hiroshima and Nagasaki burned. Instead, America inherited two very big, dirty, Asian wars that swallowed riflemen like Moloch, not to mention a plethora of lesser interventions, evacuations, incidents, and accidents that

also demanded men with hand weapons, grenades, and bayonets. And then, just to be fair, along with their own share of minor actions, the Soviets stumbled into a gut-shooting horrorshow in Afghanistan that contributed mightily to the ultimate demise of the USSR. The great hydrogen bombs have yet to be used in anger. Some revolution, huh?

Now the snake oil salesmen are at the door again, this time hawking precision strike, victory through airpower. In our lust to get "more bang for the buck" in former Secretary of Defense "Engine" Charlie Wilson's crass but oh so accurate phrasing, we can hardly wait to buy another round. Nobody wants to pay for any infantry. Let the airplanes do it.

But there is a flaw in this seductive line. Even at Khafji, the bombs killed effectively because a few men, several very young indeed, had the moral fiber to stand their ground and guide them in. Larry Lentz did his grim work as personally as if using a rifle, albeit a very big one. Few though they were, America's infantry was in and around Khafji, and even more important, nearby in numbers sufficient to pull the situation out of the hopper if everything went completely to hell. What will happen in a

future war when we have only the wonderful warplanes, we
bomb and bomb, and the enemy does not crack?

Then America may learn that there can be worse things
than dead riflemen—and we will have plenty of them, too.
The United States went there before, in the summer of 1950
in Korea.²⁶ Sad to say, the country seems to be headed in
the same direction again.

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ENDNOTES

The epigraph comes from a telephone conversation on 22 December 1997. Colonel Walter B. Clark served 26 1/2 years in the Regular Army, leading infantrymen from platoon through brigade-equivalent echelon. He fought in the Korean War, and also served in the Second Korean Conflict (1966-69) and the Vietnam War. As a platoon leader in the 65th Infantry Regiment, Walter B. Clark received the Silver Star for gallantry in hand to hand combat in Korea in 1953. He is the very model of a professional infantry officer, and a 1970 graduate of the U.S. Army War College.

¹ Rick Atkinson, *Crusade* (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993), 202.

² Col. Charles J. Quilter, II, USMCR, *With the I Marine Expeditionary Force in Desert Shield and Desert Storm* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Printing Office, 1993).

³ For these sentiments, see Atkinson, *Crusade*, 205-06 and Michael R. Gordon and Lt. Gen. Bernard E. Trainor, USMC, (Ret.), *The Generals' War* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, and Co., 1995), 285-86.

⁴ Lt. Col. Charles H. Cureton, USMCR, *With the 1st Marine Division in Desert Shield and Desert Storm* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Printing Office, 1993), 43.

⁵ Greg Walker, *At the Hurricane's Eye* (New York, NY: Ivy Books, 1994), 180; Guy Gugliotta, "Iraqi Ground Troops Battle with Tenacity," *Washington Post*, 4 February 1991, A13. Both Walker and Gugliotta interviewed participants. For details on the Chinese-designed Type 63, also known as the North China Industries Corporation model YW 531, see Christopher F. Foss, editor, *Jane's Armour and Artillery* 1995 (Alexandria, Va.: Jane's Information Group, Inc., 1995), 286-87.

⁶ Orr Kelly, *Never Fight Fair* (New York City, N.Y.: Pocket Books, 1995), 346-47. Joe Baxter is a pseudonym used to protect the SEAL's identity.

⁷ Philip Shanon, "Copter Pilot, After Battle, No Longer Sees Quick War," *New York Times*, 3 February 1991, 15; Atkinson, *Crusade*, 202.

⁸ Orr Kelly, *Brave Men, Dark Waters* (Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1992), 235-36; Atkinson, *Crusade*, 202-03; Kevin Dockery, *SEALS in Action* (New York: Avon Books, 1991), 291; Walker, *At the Hurricane's Eye*, 180-81. In Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, 291, the authors charge that the U.S. SOF "abandoned their cryptographic material for encoding radio messages and other classified items."

⁹ Atkinson, *Crusade*, 203; Quilter, *With the I Marine Expeditionary Force in Desert Shield and Desert Storm*, 60.

¹⁰ U.S., Department of Defense, *Final Report to Congress: Conduct of the Persian Gulf War* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Printing Office, April 1992), 131; Walker, *At the Hurricane's Eye*, 230, 239.

¹¹ Atkinson, *Crusade*, 204; Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, 291; Cureton, *With the 1st Marine Division in Desert Shield and Desert Storm*, 43-44. These three sources together tell the full story of the two teams in Al Khafji. Atkinson talked to Lentz. Gordon and Trainor spoke with Ingraham. Cureton provides the view from the 3d Marine Regiment.

¹² Caryle Murphy and Guy Gugliotta, "Saudi Town Reclaimed; Trapped Marines Freed," *Washington Post*, 1 February 1991, 1; Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, 294. Murphy and Gugliotta interviewed the Marines who stayed in Al Khafji.

¹³ Atkinson, *Crusade*, 209.

¹⁴ Brig. Gen. John H. Admire, USMC, "The 3d Marines in DESERT STORM," *Marine Corps Gazette* (September 1991), 68.

¹⁵ Lt. Col. Martin N. Stanton, USA, "The Saudi Arabian National Guard Motorized Brigades," *Armor* (March-April 1996), 8-9; Atkinson, *Crusade*, 209; Trainor and Gordon, *The Generals' War*, 296; Cureton, *With the 1st Marine Division in Desert Shield and Desert Storm*, 44-45.

¹⁶ Atkinson, *Crusade*, 210.

¹⁷ Ibid.; Philip D. Chinnery, *Any Time, Any Place: Fifty Years of USAF Air Commando and Special Operations Forces, 1944-1994* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1994), 255-56; Walker, *At the Hurricane's Eye*, 230.

¹⁸ Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, 299. Ingraham's account appears to come from a post-battle letter to his father.

¹⁹ Atkinson, *Crusade*, 211; Cureton, *With the 1st Marine Division in Desert Shield and Desert Storm*, 45.

²⁰ Stanton, "The Saudi Arabian National Guard Motorized Brigades," 10-11; Admire, "The 3d Marines in DESERT STORM," 68-69.

²¹ Elliot A. Cohen, director, *Gulf War Air Power Survey*, five volumes (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Printing Office, 1993), *Volume II: Effects and Effectiveness*, 237-38, 239-40; Lt. Col. Theodore N. Herman, USMC, (Ret.), "Harriers in the Breach," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* (February 1996), 46-47.

²² U.S., Department of Defense, *Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Printing Office, May 1997), iv, 14, 39. Interestingly, the phrase "revolution in military affairs" was lifted, without attribution, from a Soviet book titled *Scientific-Technical Progress and the Revolution in Military Affairs*, translated and published in 1973 by the U.S. Air Force. Written in the 1960s, the Soviet original referred to the changes wrought by nuclear weaponry. This phrase reflects one of the American military's many direct borrowings of Soviet-era military jargon. Others include operational art (conduct of military campaigns, linking overall strategy and battlefield tactics) and weapons of mass destruction (nuclear, chemical, and biological arms). One of the more noteworthy nods to Soviet military prowess involved the code-name for the Gulf War's offensive segment. In naming Operation *Desert Storm*, U.S. planners intentionally drew its name from the equally decisive and one-sided 1945 Soviet blitzkrieg of Japanese-held Manchuria, *August Storm*. The Soviet Union may be dead, but its military thought lives on in the professional discourse of its former foes.

²³ Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review*, 3.

²⁴ Quoted in James Kitfield, "To Halt an Enemy," *Air Force* (January 1998), 65.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ The classic version of this argument can be found in T.R. Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War* (New York City, N.Y.: Macmillan Company, 1963), especially 426-43.xxxiii

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